

## CLAIMS

1-12. (Previously Canceled)

13. (Currently Amended) A method for validating messaging transactions between customers served by voice mail servers located in different geographic regions, operated by different service providers, or both, the method comprising:

creating a messaging directory with information on characteristics of respective voice mail servers;

a. ~~querying at least one~~ the messaging directory in order to identify a first voice mail server associated with a caller originating a message and a second voice mail server associated with the recipient of the message; and

b. ~~determining~~, based on the identities of the first and second voice mail servers, causing the messaging directory to check the respective characteristics of the two voice mail servers to determine whether the message may be transferred between the first and second voice mail servers.

14. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 13 wherein the querying involves using the identities of the first and second voice mail servers to determine (i) their locations, (ii) the identity of the one or more service provider(s) operating the first or second voice mail server or (iii) both the locations of the first and second voice mail servers and the identity of the one or more service provider(s) operating the first or second voice mail servers.

15. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the querying is performed by providing ~~a database~~ the messaging directory with at least the message recipient's telephone number correlated to at least the identities of one of the first or second voice mail ~~services~~ servers.

16. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 15 wherein the providing is implemented by formulating a query to the ~~database~~ messaging directory and transmitting the query over a network.

17. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 16 wherein the determining involves using the location of the first or second voice mail server to determine whether applicable regulatory rules allow message transactions between those locations.

18. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 13 wherein the determining step involves determining whether the message transaction may proceed if the identities of the service providers operating the first and second voice mail servers are different.

19. (Currently Amended) A process for determining the identity of a first voice mail server associated with an originating caller that has left a message with a second voice mail server associated with a receiving caller that may seek to respond to the message, the process comprising;

ascertaining an identifier associated with the originating caller;

using the identifier to determine an identity code that identifies the first voice mail server ~~and correlates with the identifier;~~

~~associating the first voice mail server's~~ using the identity code to determine information ~~selected from the group consisting of:~~ including the location of the first voice mail server, the identity of the service provider operating the first voice mail server, and the existence of agreements between the first service provider and other service providers; and

determining using the information to determine whether the receiving caller may communicate with the first voice mail server in response to the message.

20. (Currently Amended) A method for validating the passage of data between customers of different companies operating messaging servers that serve different areas, the method comprising:

causing a messaging directory to include information relating to the passage of data between customers of different companies operating messaging servers that serve different areas; and causing the messaging directory to use the information including

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using business rules, regulatory rules or both to determine whether the data may be passed between the customers' messaging servers.

21. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 20 further comprising identifying the voice mail servers involved in the passage of the data.

22. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 21 further comprising using the identities of the voice mail servers to determine their respective locations, their respective operating service providers or both.

23. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 22 further comprising applying regulatory rules to determine whether the data may be passed between the identified voice mail servers.

24. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 23 further comprising determining whether the operating service providers will accept data from one another.

25. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 24 further comprising confirming to the customer the destination of the data or message.

26. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 20 further comprising the step of out-dialing a telephone call to a person not subscribing to regional messaging services in order to deliver a message.

27. (Cancelled). Please cancel Claim 27.

28. (Cancelled) Please cancel Claim 28.

29. (Cancelled) Please cancel Claim 29.

30. (Cancelled) Please cancel Claim 30.